



By

ELISABETH PULLEN

which must be done. Let me go home."

Of course, it wasn't regular, but Mr. Denim or any other man would not have dared to refuse her. So away I went with my lady, taking great care of my manners, not to cut across her feelings, as near as I could guess at them. It seemed a long drive before we reached her house, somewhere in the region of Washington square. Her maid came out to meet her and carry in her wraps, a French girl that made me think of a skirt dancer brought up by Shakers. I guess she came from Paris a number of years ago, and had been in the Willett's house ever since.

"Delphine," said her mistress, "this young gentleman, the son of a school friend of mine, is come to visit me for a few days."

Poor lady, she spoke hoarser than before, and yet with a sharp note which didn't belong to her voice.

"I hope, madame, that you have not taken a cold. That would be a pity, when this monsieur is just arrived to make the house a little gay for you, after so long time that it is triste," said the French girl.

I can tell you I was badly scared to have to sit down to dinner with that great lady; and yet, after I got the run of the different forks and wine glasses, I wished that Lucy could be a mouse in the wall for a few minutes, to see me in with the Pour l'honneur. And she could have told you, better than I can, what Mrs. Willett wore. It was gray velvet, with a smoky yellow lace thing on her shoulders, that, no doubt, was worth enough money to set Lucy and me up in housekeeping, if we had so much. The bodies were out square. She had a magnificent figure for her age, had Mrs. Willett. There was a close necklace set with great rubies around her throat. I hated to look at it, for it appeared as if her head had been cut off, and showed the red line of drops of blood. But she was as handsome as one of those heathen goddesses at the museum.

After dinner she talked a great deal, although she was very hoarse, and she often put her hand to her chest, as if it hurt her there. What did she talk about? Oh, anything; the news of the day mostly. Before eleven o'clock she excused herself, on account of her cold.

"And I have something to do—something to do," she muttered, as if she were talking to herself.

Now, I have known people to slip right from under a detective's hands and over the borders of death. And there is no extradition treaty between the United States and the next world. I guessed what I was thinking about.

"I will not evade you in any way," he told me. "I see nothing better than that justice be done and I will

"I shall make no trouble," she told me. "I will go where you please."

So I took her up to our Mrs. Tripp. Mr. Denim saw the procession of two Mrs. Willett walking like a queen and

moment was as if she had triumphed over everything, a sort of solemn smile. The woman must have been as near sixty as fifty, but there was something in her countenance as if she and time had no longer to do with each other.

At last I got to sleep, but woke again before dawn, just as the outlines of the heavy, old-fashioned wardrobe and toilet table were beginning to show, and the air had a blackish grayness as if night had been ground to powder and would soon blow away. I heard Mrs. Willett pass my room and go to her chamber. Then she must have watched all night in her son's room—poor soul!

When the darky footman brought me a can of hot water and my boots he told me that Mrs. Willett was ill with a cold on the chest. She hoped to rise later. I was to entertain myself, so I passed the day in the library reading "Tribby." That is a book that talks to you where you live, whatever you know or don't know. Now, I can't tell an old master from a ten-store chromo, nor one note of music from another, but I can just see those English fellows paint and hear Tribby sing. And that's the genius of the book.

In the afternoon—to go on with my story—Delphine came and told me that her mistress was very ill; the doctors had a consultation. It was a case of double pneumonia and some sort of a nervous shock, which they couldn't account for. Anyway, she was going to die. And it was the tenth anniversary of the death of her son, who was killed on the doorsteps of his father's house—a frightful affair, Delphine said. The French woman, on her own responsibility, had sent for a sister of charity, who was now taking care of Mrs. Willett.

An hour later Delphine came to me again. "Madam wishes to see you, monsieur," she said. "If you could say something to comfort her! Speak to her of times when you saw her in



IT WAS THE ROOM OF A RATHER FRISKY FELLOW.

company with madam, your mother. Agreeable memories might console her."

Great pleasure she would have, poor lady, in a reminder of the first time that she and I had met, the day before I followed Delphine to Mrs. Willett's room. She called in a low voice to Sister Perpetua, who came forward and asked me to enter. The chamber was somewhat darkened. I could see Mrs. Willett's white face, framed in iron-gray hair, and her hands twitching upon the crimson counterpane. She opened her large black eyes and looked at me. It seemed as if she held me by those eyes, so that I was bound to hear and remember every word that she had to say. And I shall not forget that quarter-hour—not until I pass in my own last report. She spoke in short phrases, because the breath only came from her throat now, her lungs were solid. There was a bluish shadow around her mouth and nostrils, like the shadow that the smoke of a locomotive casts upon a field of snow.

I felt mean; I wanted to lynch myself, for it seemed to me that I had hunted that grand creature with the piteous eyes to her death. Of course that wasn't so; I had only done my duty, and she already had a cold on her chest when she came into Denim & Crepon's. But the nervous shock—of course I could tell myself off easy was to keep thinking that I had only done my duty. But if ever such a case comes into the day's work again I will pull out of my job, and Denim & Crepon must look out for a tougher man.

Well, Mrs. Willett began to speak to me. I could see that her mind went off a little now and then. But she knew what she was talking about. At first her manner was very polite, as if I were a visitor that she was entertaining; later, she appeared to talk because she must, and it was heart-breaking to hear her. I should have broken down more than once, only there was Sister Perpetua, calm and almost smiling. I don't know how they do it, those sisters; they are full of pity, and yet they never seem to get rattled nor shed a tear.

"I gave my word that I would not evade you," Mrs. Willett said to me. "This morning, indeed, I feared that I should be forced to break my promise. But one could not blame a dead woman for not keeping an appointment, could one? And now I am much better. Earlier, I could not speak. It is a very severe cold, the doctor says."

"I am glad that you are feeling better, madam," said I, awkwardly enough.

"Thank you. But the truth is, it will not last. I shall escape the law here on earth. But I shall not escape the law in the next world—I shall go straight to hell, you know! Oh, I shall be so happy there!"

"Heaven, you mean, dear," Sister Perpetua corrected her.

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MR. DENIM TOOK IT UP FROM THE FLOOR.

before I shall have explained all. I want it to be known that I have stolen, for eight years. And now I need not steal any more. They took away the lace handkerchief, but they cannot take away from me my sin and its everlasting punishment. They cannot touch that. And I am glad!

"I will tell you all about it, Edwin, that was my son; my own dear, dear little boy. Ah, bye-low, bye-low, rock-a-bye baby!"

It was terrible to hear that poor mother sing in her stifled, broken voice, laying one arm in the other and rocking it as if it were a young child. Then she gave a little scream and came to herself.

"Sister Perpetua, as you have mercy, do not let me lose myself again before I have told everything. What was I saying? Yes, my son Edwin. He was not bad. You must not believe that. I swear it. He was not bad. And he loved his mother. He did not love his father. His father was hard on him. Mr. Willett would blame my boy for reading a novel on Sunday, as if he had broken all the commandments. 'He that sins breaks the whole law,' Edwin's father would say. My son liked to do as others did. No worse than the others. When I could I gave him money. I sold some jewels, but my husband missed them and asked for them. They were not mine. Only to wear. They were an investment. You know how some women live like queens and have not a dollar to spend as they please. That was the way with me. I have all Mr. Willett's money now. But it is ten years that I have not my son. Now I am going to find Edwin. Money will be of no use in hell—it would melt, would it not?"

She was wandering again, poor soul. Sister Perpetua gave her a spoonful of something from a vial. I noticed that the good sister began to look scared, and that made me feel a little lonesome. Mrs. Willett went on talking, all on one note, dull and hollow, like the woodpecker tapping, as you might say.

"Edwin had debts. For horses, wines, tailors' bills—I do not know what. Poor boy, he could not pass through certain streets, for fear of the cruel men whom he owed. He was his father's clerk. His salary was no more than that of the other clerks. He took twelve thousand dollars from the safe. If a speculation which he made had succeeded, he would have replaced the money. But the market had dropped. And that money was only borrowed—an advance on what would some day be his own, you understand. His father found out about the deficit in the safe, and cursed him, and sent for the police. Edwin could have escaped. But he stayed to kiss his mother good-bye. I hurried him out of the house. The officers called to him to stand still. He leaped down the steps to run. They sprang at him; he stumbled and fell. That killed my boy. I carried him in my own arms into the house. They could not take him, dead, to prison. So I had him all to myself for awhile. His father would not look at him. He told me that my son was in hell."

"I wished to have my child buried quietly, without persons coming to stare at him. His father would have all the relatives bidden. The clergyman said at the funeral that my son was in hell. Mr. Willett told him to say that. Told him to make Edwin serve as a warning to the young men of his kindred. I never went to church after that day. No matter what the preacher might say, I should always hear him declare that my son is in hell."

"A year later Mr. Willett had paralysis. I took care of him faithfully. There never was a word spoken between us about Edwin. When Mr. Willett was dying he said to me: 'Suzanna, you have been a good wife to me. I hope to meet you above.' I closed his eyes; and began to plan how to avoid him in eternity. For I want to live forever with my boy. He loved me. His father did not love me. He could not love anything but money and respectability. I trust that he has them where he is. Of course he is in Heaven, for he always did what he thought right. But for virtue such as his, there ought to be a Heaven with hard golden pavements and no love. He would enjoy that. As for me, I will go with my son."

"Now, listen! I thought that if my Edwin must go to hell for stealing, that would be the way for me, too."

A woman to steal so much—\$12,000. It would take a long time. But I could wait. I stole, stole, where I could. It was such a comfort to me. Every trifle—a fan, a bracelet—brought me a step further on the way that my son went. When I first thought of this plan I was so happy that I laughed aloud. My good Delphine feared that I was going mad. For my son had not been dead two years—and I was laughing.

"I have never permitted anyone to enter his room. I have dusted it every day myself. It is precisely as he left it. Everything which I stole I carried there. And I know that Edwin has seen how hard I have tried to come to him. It has been like digging a tunnel—down, down, down—with my teeth and nails. I have kept the account of all that I stole. It is in a ledger there, debit and credit. I have paid my passage to hell. Names of shops, prices of articles, date of theft, all are written in that book—\$12,000 with that final \$35, I registered the lace last night. And I arranged the articles according as they belong to different shops. Will you take them back for me to those shops—afterwards? And pay whatever is right for keeping the goods out so long? They will call me a kleptomaniac, you know. They will pity me, perhaps. But I shall not need pity—for I shall be safe in hell with my son."

Then she turned sharply toward Sister Perpetua, who was running her beads through her fingers in what you might call a confusion of prayer and scare. I don't suppose that the good nun had ever heard anybody talk like that in all her life. And the sisters of charity see pretty much every sort, too. They wouldn't care for a macadamized golden street—they deserve a soft place in the best kind of another world, for they practice good will and mercy in this one. As I was saying, Mrs. Willett turned sharp on Sister Perpetua and used plain language to her.

"You say that I ought to wish to go to Heaven. You do not understand. I tell you that the name is nothing—heaven or hell. For me the good place is where my boy is! Stop praying if you believe that your prayers will keep me away from him. Have I worked hard at sin for eight long years to have you secure my pardon at last? Stop praying! Do you want to send me where Caleb Willett claws his golden harp with fingers that clutch as if he were counting money, with a golden crown on his doddling head? Do you suppose that I should care to meet him again? And the relatives who gloated over my poor boy and blamed him in his coffin? For all these years I have been doing evil in order to go to find my son. I would not have done so much to meet his father again. And yet that would have been almost worth it! I was alone in mourning for my child. Now he will be all mine! All mine, my dear little Edwin!"

Then Mrs. Willett's voice was so choked that we could hardly catch her words. They were dreadful:

"Fire, fire, and the worm that dieth not. His father said that. My poor boy, do not be afraid. Mother is coming."

The pupils of her eyes grew larger, as if the light were falling before them. Then—and I am glad to remember it—the trouble and strain passed away from her face. She lifted herself a little, put out her arms toward something that the sister and I could not see, and then fell back dead.

While Sister Perpetua was doing the last offices for the poor lady, I went into the son's chamber. It was the room of a rather frisky fellow, for a fact. On the walls there were photographs of actresses and race horses; lying about were cigarette cases, scarf pins, theater programmes, light gloves, a high-heeled red satin slipper, a perfumed note or two—all that sort of rubbish. A boy that thought he was seeing life; but I don't think that he was a bad sort on the whole. I am bound to believe so, for his mother swore it to me. And she was a woman of honor. All the stolen goods were there, according to schedule, and arranged as she had said. I went over her accounts, and they were correct. She had stolen to the amount of an even twelve thousand dollars.

After the funeral I got Sister Perpetua to help me to pack up the snary. It needed a woman's hand, though Lucy would have done it better, being more accustomed to such things. I

Mrs. Willett; somehow, it doesn't seem fair. Perhaps I shall tell her after we are married, next summer. A man ought to tell his wife everything—isn't that about right?

As I said, Sister Perpetua and I packed up the goods; they were sent back to the owners, and it was all made square and hushed up. Of course, Mrs. Willett's lawyer had to know about the business, and he talked kleptomaniac. Nothing surprises New York much. Well, I could not help telling Sister Perpetua that, according to my belief, Mrs. Willett and her son would be agreeably disappointed in regard to their place in the next world. Because she was surely a noble-hearted woman, and a mother as real as they make them. And it wasn't likely that her son was half a bad fellow. In fact, she said that he was not. And we all of us run off the track sometimes. Then I saw that I had made a bad break and corrected myself: "Not you, of course, sister. The most of us, I meant to say."

"We will trust that love has saved those two poor souls together," answered Sister Perpetua.

MEAT FOR THE WEDDING.

She Was Bound to Have Ham at Any Cost.

I was sitting on a keg of nails in the store, which was part and parcel of the mountain mining company's outfit, when a saffron "complected" woman in a sloomlike calico gown and a collapsed sunbonnet came in and addressed herself to me.

"Air you the storekeeper?" she inquired.

"No," I replied, "but if there is anything you want in a hurry, I can accommodate you, I guess. The storekeeper has gone over to the mill for a few minutes."

"Well, I was thinkin' uv gittin' a ham of meat," he said, hesitatingly.

"It can get that for you."

"It won't be no trouble, will it?"

"Oh, no; I'll only have to carry it in here."

"What's the price uv a ham?" she asked, as I started out.

"It will cost you about three dollars."

"When?" she exclaimed, "that's a good deal of money, ain't it?"

"Yes, if you haven't much."

"Well, I hain't got a big pile."

"Why don't you get side meat? That will cost you ten cents a pound, and you can take as little as you want."

She threw up her head and sniffed the air haughtily.

"Not no side meat for me," she said, with the air of a queen. "We uns is goin' to have a weddin' an' an' infair afterwards, an' side meat ain't no fittin' eatin' for a thing like that. No, sirree, we air goin' to have ham meat if it takes all the money I got, an' a mortgage on the furniture in the house to boot."

Fortunately the mortgage wasn't necessary.—Detroit Free Press.

Spotted by Overdoing.

Cholly (on his knees)—Maud, you have intoxicated me with your charms. Maud—Pshaw! You're no match for me.

Cholly—Why not?

Maud—You get drunk too easily.—Town Topics.

EMERSON'S COMPROMISE.

Mr. Winterbottom—Emily, the doctor says all we need for these colds of ours is whiskey and quinine.

Mrs. Winterbottom—Cyrus, if you think you're going to get any whiskey down my throat you are much mistaken!

"And I haven't a particle of faith in quinine. So I brought them in separate packages. Here's your quinine."—Chicago Tribune.

Why They Are Silent.

"Did you read 'The sweetest asked her, 'That poem I wrote last week?'"

"I read it years ago," she said.

And now they do not speak.—Square Moments.

FAMOUS FOLK ON WHEELS.

Lillian Russell confines her wheeling to bicycle schools at present.

Editor Charles A. Dana is said to be a convert to the joys of bicycling.

Richard Mansfield is said to be a veritable Beau Brummel on a bicycle.

Queenie Vassar rides with the ease and grace acquired only by long practice.

Japan's boast that she has adopted civilization with a capital O is undoubtedly true. The mikado rides a bicycle.

Nat Goodwin is such a wheeling crank that he carries a bicycle with him when he is playing all over the country.

Cissy Fitzgerald, with the proverbial wink, takes the greatest delight in the world in showing her superior knowledge of the wheel.

It is stated by those who know that the king of Belgium always has a tricycle included among his luggage when he happens to be absent from his capital.

Mme. Karony, the beautiful Syrian woman who played so prominent a part in woman's affairs at the World's fair and has since resided in this country, is very much interested in wheeling. Her costume consists of a pair of Turkish bloomer trousers with leggings, surmounted by a zouave jacket and blouse waist.

White "Wash Silk" Won't Wash.

It is a curious thing that the only "wash silk" nowadays used in fancy work about which one has trouble is white. The delicate pinks and blues and greens come from a judiciously applied bath with their pristine glories untarnished. But white, so far as known, will persistently turn yellow, and nothing can be found to remedy it.

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